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Asbestos discoveries spur

By Jason Lehmann
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State environmental officials are wondering if a rare type of asbestos recently discovered at a Livingston business is the same type of asbestos the Montana Department of Environmental Quality is cleaning up from the Milwaukee Railroad Depot site in Bozeman.

After an April fire at Clara's Closet Red Cross Thrift Store — formerly located 306 S. Main St. — firefighters looking for the source of the fire exposed a significant amount of asbestos in the attic, said John Podolinsky, with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Asbestos Control Program in Helena.

The fact that asbestos was found in the early 20th-century building is hardly unusual — the fibrous mineral was used extensively in construction as a fire retardant and insulator from the late 1800s to the 1980s.

Earlier this summer, asbestos was also discovered at the Frontier Per-

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— John Podolinsky, Montana DEQ

sonal Care Center at 121 S. Third St., which opened in March, 1913. Construction workers installing an elevator "impacted the ceiling area," Podolinsky said, which is when the asbestos was discovered.

Both buildings are currently undergoing asbestos mitigation, which is being overseen by Brickley Construction Co. of Butte and Helena.

"This is a problem in general with older buildings," Podolinsky said of the asbestos insulation.

But what has DEQ officials scratching their heads is the type of asbestos found in Clara's Closet — anthophyllite — possibly came from a now-defunct mine north of Big Sky and was processed at the site of the old Milwaukee Railroad Depot on East Main Street in Bozeman.

Anthophyllite is one of several types of asbestos classified as "friable," or easily breakable. Friable asbestos poses a health risk to humans, Podolinsky said, because its fibers are easily inhaled, which can lead to a slew of lung ailments, including cancer.

Another type of asbestos called actinolite was found in the Frontier Personal Care Center, said Pierre Amicucci of the DEQ, who is overseeing the cleanup at that building and at Clara's Closet.

Now DEQ officials are attempting to find out where else the anthophyllite asbestos mined in Gallatin Canyon was used.

"A lot of it (anthophyllite) went to the Bozeman Depot site, and we think that's what's in Clara's Closet right now," Podolinsky said. "What

new questions

we'd really like to find out is where this stuff has been distributed to."

According to documents obtained from the DEQ relating to the Bozeman Depot cleanup, the anthophyllite asbestos ore from "mines in Gallatin Canyon" was transported to the site, processed and stored by a company called Interstate Manufacturing, which held a lease on the site from 1953 to 1958.

David Bowers of the DEQ's Remediation Division is overseeing the cleanup at the Bozeman Depot.

"It can only be speculation right now where it (anthophyllite) came from," Bowers said. "It very well could have come from Interstate Manufacturing."

Most products made with asbestos throughout the 20th century were made with a more common type called chrysotile. Anthophyllite asbestos is relatively rare compared to other types, Podolinsky said.

"It's stuff we rarely see and it's something we don't know a lot about," he said, which is why DEQ

officials are so eager to find out where else it was distributed.

Bowers said the effort may be like "looking for a needle in a haystack."

"What we'll be doing is investigating the Interstate Manufacturing history," Bowers said. "That's going to take some time and some digging. Hopefully we'll be coming up with some records."

Podolinsky said anthophyllite asbestos insulation has been found in homes and businesses in Livingston, Bozeman, and Helena, and was sold under the name "Karstolite," referring to the name of the mine.

He described it as "a mousy-bed material," with visible fibers.

"Home and business owners should be very concerned if they find this in their attic — if you think you have it, leave it alone," he said.

Anyone who suspects they have anthophyllite asbestos in their home or business can call the DEQ Air and Waste Management Bureau at (406) 444-3490.
